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Fact sheet

Disability in Canada: Initial findings from the Canadian Survey on Disability

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The following symbols are used in Statistics Canada publications:

- .. not available for any reference period
- ... not available for a specific reference period
- .. not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- p preliminary
- r revised
- x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the Statistics Act
- E use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- * significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

This fact sheet provides the first results of the Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), which was conducted by Statistics Canada in the fall of 2012. The CSD provides estimates of persons reporting a disability by type in Canada. It collected essential information on supports for persons with disabilities, as well as on their employment profile, income and participation in society.

The survey population comprised all Canadians aged 15 or older as of May 10, 2011 who were living in private dwellings. As the institutionalized population is excluded, the data, particularly for the older age groups, should be interpreted accordingly.

The CSD uses the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health framework of disability. This framework defines disability as the relationship between body function and structure, daily activities and social participation, while recognizing the role of environmental factors. In keeping with this framework, the CSD targeted respondents who not only have a difficulty or impairment due to a long-term condition or health problem **but also experience a limitation in their daily activities**. The CSD definition of disability includes anyone who reported being "sometimes", "often" or "always" limited in their daily activities due to a long-term condition or health problem, as well as anyone who reported being "rarely" limited if they were also unable to do certain tasks or could only do them with a lot of difficulty.

The CSD, which was funded by Employment and Social Development Canada, incorporates significant changes from the Participation and Activity Limitation Surveys (PALS) and to the way in which disability is defined. As a result, comparisons cannot be made between PALS and CSD data. For further details on these changes, refer to the Canadian Survey on Disability, 2012: Concepts and Methods Guide, forthcoming.

An estimated 3.8 million adult Canadians reported being limited in their daily activities due to a disability in 2012. This represents 13.7% of the adult population.

Pain, mobility and flexibility limitations are most prevalent

Over 11% of Canadian adults experienced one of the three most prevalent disability types: pain, mobility or flexibility. Of those who reported at least one of these disability types in 2012, more than 40% experienced all three at the same time.

The next most commonly reported disabilities were mental/psychological, 3.9%; dexterity, 3.5%; hearing, 3.2%; seeing, 2.7%; followed by memory and learning disabilities, 2.3% each. Less than 1% of Canadian adults reported a developmental disability.

Table 1
Prevalence of disability by type, Canada, 2012

Disability type	percentage
Pain	9.7
Flexibility	7.6
Mobility	7.2
Mental/psychological	3.9
Dexterity	3.5
Hearing	3.2
Seeing	2.7
Memory	2.3
Learning	2.3
Developmental	0.6
Unknown	0.3

Prevalence rises with age

The prevalence of disability increases steadily with age: 2.3 million working-age Canadians (15 to 64), or 10.1%, reported having a disability in 2012, compared to 33.2% of Canadian seniors—those aged 65 or older. Within the working-age population, those reporting a disability was 4.4% for people aged 15 to 24, 6.5% for those 25 to 44 and 16.1% for those 45 to 64. This proportion reaches 26.3% for those aged 65 to 74 and 42.5% among those 75 and older.

The most prevalent types of disability also vary by age. In the youngest age group, 15 to 24, the most commonly reported types of disability were mental/psychological disabilities, 2.2%; learning disabilities, 2.0%; and pain, 1.9%. Among those aged 45 to 64, the most common were pain, 12.7%; flexibility, 9.8%; and mobility, 8.6%. While these three types of disabilities are also the most commonly reported among seniors, the prevalence was higher: 22.1% for pain, 20.5% for mobility and 19.3% for flexibility. The prevalence of hearing disabilities was also high among seniors, 10.4%.

Table 2
Prevalence of disability by sex and age group, Canada, 2012

Age groups	Both sexes	Men	Women
	percentage		
Total – aged 15 and over	13.7	12.5	14.9
15 to 64	10.1	9.5	10.7
15 to 24	4.4	4.5	4.3
25 to 44	6.5	6.0	7.1
45 to 64	16.1	15.2	17.1
65 and over	33.2	30.8	35.2
65 to 74	26.3	25.0	27.5
75 and over	42.5	39.8	44.5

Women have a higher prevalence of disability in almost all age groups

The proportion of those reporting a disability among adult women was 14.9%; for men, 12.5%. Among the oldest Canadians (those 75 and older), 44.5% of women reported a disability compared to 39.8% of men. In the 15 to 24 age group, the proportion reporting a disability for each sex was similar in 2012: 4.5% for men and 4.3% for women.

Over one-quarter of persons with disabilities classified as having a very severe disability

A severity score was developed for the CSD, which takes into account the number of disability types, the intensity of difficulties and the frequency of activity limitations. Using this score, persons with disabilities were classified into four severity levels: mild, moderate, severe and very severe. In 2012, 26.0% of persons with disabilities were classified as very severe; 22.5%, severe; 19.8%, moderate; and 31.7%, mild.

More than 8 out of 10 persons with disabilities use aids and assistive devices

Specialized equipment and aids often enable persons with disabilities to carry out their daily activities, for example by facilitating movement (e.g., wheelchairs, hand and arm supports) or helping them hear, see or learn (e.g., hearing aids, magnifiers or specialized computers). Having the appropriate aids can enable an individual to participate more fully in society. In 2012, 81.3% of persons with disabilities reported using some kind of aid or assistive device.

This fact sheet, together with *Canadian Survey on Disability, 2012: Data Tables*, which includes provincial and territorial data, provides the first survey results. More data analyses and tables will be published in 2014. Custom data tables are available upon request at sasd-dssea@statcan.gc.ca.